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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses briefly the expanded parameters of a graduate-level communication course taught at West Texas A&M University. The focus of this paper is to identify three key issues that must be taught to would-be college instructors, concepts that go beyond points about presentational concerns or "how-to-teach" tips. The key issues are: (1) preparation for tenure and promotion; (2) what "professional service" really means; and (3) gender inequities in the college classroom. (SR)

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Preparing College Professors for Successful Teaching Careers

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Training College Professors for Successful Teaching Careers

A favorite cartoon of mine that I distribute to graduate students enrolled in the College Teaching course which I instruct is shown below:

The inexperienced teaching assistant attempts to wing it.

Probably most college professors can empathize with the beginning teaching assistant. We have flown those same flight patterns and made some crash landings of our own. The focus of this paper is to identify key issues that must be taught to would-be college instructors, concepts that go beyond points about presentational concerns or "how-to-teach" tips.

In the course I teach at West Texas A&M University, Communication Instruction at the College Level, SCOM 5585, I have expanded the parameters of this course to include larger issues facing those who choose a career in higher education. Three key issues that must be addressed are:

- Preparation for Tenure and Promotion

- What "Professional Service" Really Means
- Gender Inequities in the College Classroom

Many of my students have visions of themselves in classrooms filled with attentive students, discussing important concepts with energy and enthusiasm. These future professors know how to prepare behaviorally stated objectives and detailed course syllabi. They understand about using active learning in the classroom rather than relying on the lecture method. They understand the importance of teacher immediacy so far as student motivation is concerned. What they do not know and often have not thought about is the larger issue of "Now that I have this teaching job, how do I keep it?" It has become increasingly evident to me that we must help students understand the process of tenure and promotion, how to document good teaching, as well as good research. Many of my students will find themselves teaching at 2-year institutions which have no tenure system. However, even these institutions have an appraisal system that requires teachers to document what they do. Seldin's (1993) advice about preparing teaching portfolios needs to be discussed and understood. Documenting teaching activities can begin while students are serving as teaching assistants. They need to know the kinds of materials to include in their portfolios, as well as a way to organize those materials for review.

Professional service is another issue of which my students seem to have limited knowledge. On a recent student's comprehensive exam, he wrote about *community* service in answering the question about the tension between research, teaching and service, not realizing that his response needed to specify *professional* service. Part of professional service, of course, is making students aware of professional communication organizations with which they can become affiliated. Some introduction to graduate study courses may cover this information. However, in my experience, students in my classes were not familiar with state, regional, or national

communication associations. Spending time in class discussing these associations, their publications and their convention activities is time, that I consider, well-spent. Future professors need to know something about institutional governance and college committees and how expectations for service varies with the type of institution at which a professor teaches. My students are often a bit deflated to find their vision of a teaching load of four classes with lots of free time to spend at the golf course is an illusion!

Future professors must also become aware of the problems presented by gender inequities in college classrooms. My own observation of teaching assistants continues to show that male students--even when they are fewer in number--usually participate more frequently in class discussion and at greater length, while female students are often reticent. But classroom participation is only part of the problem that future professors need to recognize. Course materials--textbooks, videotapes, simulated games--should allow a variety of examples, featuring men and women. Critiques chosen for grading public speeches must be evaluated to see if the criteria listed favor one perspective of presentation over another. Gender issues, like multicultural issues, are sometimes ignored by beginning professors who assume that their main task is "to teach content." We must correct that misconception.

Birnbaum (1991) reminds us that "American colleges and universities are the most paradoxical of organizations" (p. 3). He indicates that while they constitute one of the largest industries in our nation they are "the least businesslike and well managed" of all organizations (p. 3). As instructors of future professors of Communication, we must prepare our students to enter such a paradoxical context.

References

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